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A Private Soldier's Christmas Dinner

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By

Arthur J. Robinson

Co E, 33 Reg. Wis.
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Address Kaukauna, Wisconsin, Box 161



A. J. ROBINSON, AUTHOR
AT 70 YEARS
242 SIXTEENTH STREET

A PRIVATE SOLDIER'S CHRISTMAS DINNER.

— 1 —

My story dates back to the sixties,
At the time of the Civil War.
We were camped in the rear of Vicksburg
On the bluff overlooking Black river.

— 2 —

We had pitched camp the 7th of December,
It was the year of eighteen sixty-three.
Forming a line of chain picket
From Hayne's Bluff to the river to ward off the enemy.

— 3 —

We had been in camp a fortnight
When the weather turned biting cold.
It was the morning of the 23d of December,
Adam Mory and I were detailed for picket.

— 4 —

It was a bitter cold night; we were forbidden a fire.
The sentinel had to keep in motion.
My turn came for sentinel at 12 midnight,
And I felt that I would surely freeze.

— 5 —

I was chilled to the bone when the relief came,
And I felt morose and gloomy.
My thoughts were of home and the fireside
And the dear ones gathered there.

— 6 —

Says Adam Mory, my comrade,
"Why are you so gloomy and sad?
Now, Arthur, I am thinking
It is better to be cheerful and glad.

— 7 —

"Now cheer up, don't be gloomy;
Tomorrow is Christmas day;
And we must be devising
Some scheme to make merry and gay.

— 8 —

“Do you remember when we returned from picket
Of seeing that sow with three pigs in the thicket
Down there where the river bends?
Let us go and reconnoiter for them.

— 9 —

“I think it quite likely we will find them
Bedded down there in the wood,
And by stealth we can catch one
And have him for a Christmas dinner.”

— 10 —

So suiting the plan we made ready
With our rubber blanket slung on our shoulder,
A hatchet and butcher knife we carry,
We stroll down through the wood.

— 11 —

It had been quite an hour when we spy them
Snugly bedded in the center of the wood.
Says Adam, “Let us crawl up sly now
And I will catch one by the hocks.”

— 12 —

Adam had caught the best one:
I with my knife cut its throat.
The old sow came up with a snort,
Look out for the razorback for she will fight.

— 13 —

Piggy lay prone and bleeding
While we ward off its mother,
With backs a bristle the three of them
But they soon give up the fight.

— 14 —

Now we set too and peel him,
Leave the head and the hocks with the hide,
It was a matter of forty minutes
Until we had piggy separated from his hide.

— 15 —

Having him all clean and ready
We rap him up in the blanket
And tie the ends in a sling.
Adam shoulders the brute and we hurry into camp.

— 16 —

It was in the twilight of evening,
The heavens were dark and grey;
When we came up to the camp guard:
“Halt! who comes there!” quoth he.

— 17 —

“Two friends,” quoth Adam in answer,
“Two boys of Company E!
We have just returned from a visit
From the 3rd Iowa camp.”

— 18 —

“Advance with the countersign,” quoth the guard,
“Or you must go to the pen.
And what have you in your blanket?
So nicely wrapped in a sling.”

— 19 —

“An opossum we catched in the bottom,
As we were coming home;
He is a fine plump little critter,
And we thought he would make a good dinner.”

— 20 —

“Forward, then, to the guard pen
And give an account to the Captain.
I think he would like to see the opossum
And see if he is quite fat.

— 21 —

“Here, Captain, are two of Company E
Who have just come straggling in;
They say they have an opossum
They catched down on the river bank.”

“Corporal, march them up to headquarters,
Let them give an account to the Colonel,
And of what they have in their catch,
And he will examine the opossum and see if he is fat.”

The Colonel came out of his tent.
Says he: “Corporal, what have you here,
And what is your report, I pray;
Have these men been insubordinate?”

“Colonel, the Captain has sent me here
With these two men of Company E;
They have just straggled into camp
With some catch there in their blanket.”

“Go back to your post, Corporal,
I will take these men in charge,
And make a thorough investigation
Of what they have in their blanket.

“Now, men, give an account of your absence;
Pray tell me where you have been,
And what have you in your blanket,
And why were you out after camp hour?”

“Colonel, we beg your pardon.”
Answered Adam with trembling voice.
“We have just returned from a visit
From the 3rd Iowa camp.

“We spy an opossum, hanging
In a persimmon tree,
And we thought that we could make the catch
And get back to camp quite early.”

"Open up the blanket and let me see the opossum,
"Let me see the shape of his body;
His head, his ears, and his tail,
I would examine the carcass to see if it is fat."

I quickly opened up the blanket
And spread the brute out in view.
"Rather odd shape for an opossum.
Though plump and juicy and fat."

"Colonel, we left the head and hocks
Along with the hide and offing.
Down there on the river bank.
We have cleaned the brute ready for the pot."

"Now, boys, you may take your opossum
And go right to your camp;
And when you have cooked him good and brown
You will bring me up a quarter."

"Well, Arthur, you have saved the day:
I thought we were in for a punish.
Hall will cook that brute fine and tender
And the Colonel shall have his quarter."

We hurried to camp, it was getting late.
It was time for the retreat;
We stowed away the opossum
Just in time, for the taps were beating.

At the first sound of the reveille
Adam and I were astir,
And slip our catch to the cook's table
And have placed it quite unobserved.

“By the gads,” said Hall when he found it,
From whence did this brute come?
It is the making of a fine dinner.
Who caught this fine porker?”

“Whist,” said Adam; “Opossum is the word
That Arthur and I have been sworn by.
We caught the brute down in the wood,
And thought it would make a fine dinner.”

“By the gads, you are right, my boys.
With a little extra for a filling;
We must have a peck of sweet potatoes,
Some onion and sage for a dressing.

“Now, boys, we will all get busy
And prepare this opossum for dinner:
Hiram and Tony will go for wood
And build a good hot fire.

“Adam and Arthur, you go to Aunt Dina
And borrow her big bake oven;
Sergeant Richards, have you a half dollar?
Corporal Clifford, another to chip in?

“Thank you, that will be quite sufficient;
Billy will take the money to buy the dressing.
Potatoes and onions and sage,
With a peck of good cooking apples.”

We each start out on our errand
And accomplish the part we have sought,
Returning to find Hall quite ready
To put the brute in the pot.

Hall soon has all a simmering
Over a hot glowing bed of coals,
Lifting the lid every five minutes
To turn and baste with some dope.

He now puts in the potatoes to bake,
In the stew along with the brute,
And all is quite ready and brown
When the bugle sounds the tattoo.

Sergeant Richard commands, "Line up, boys."
"Halt," says Mory with a jump.
"Hall, prepare a quarter for the Colonel,
And I will take it to his tent."

Mory came back to the mess
With a merry chuckle and grin,
Holding up a silver dollar
The Colonel had pitched to him.

We are all ready for the line up,
With cup and plate in hand;
We march up in single file,
Hall serves the meat, while Billy serves the coffee.

Says Hall: "Sergeant, what is your choice?"
"Slice of the ham and section of rib and loin."
"Now, Corporal, pray what may be your choice?"
"The same as the sergeant, if you please, sir."

"Now, Adam, what may I serve you?
I suppose, like Adam of old,
You will want a section of rib
To replace the one that was stole."

"Well, Arthur, what shall I serve you?"
"A section of two ribs and loin."
"Well that will finish them quite,
O! potatoes and dressing I had quite forgot!

"Now, Hiram, you are lucky if you get a bite,
But I think there is enough to go around,
A slice of ham with dressing
Potatoes and apple sauce.

"Well, Tony, by jabers, and what will your's be?"
"By the holy saints be it Friday?"
"I will take of the piece that crawled up the tree last,
Then I will go to the Praist for confession."

"Now, Billy, you and I will take pot luck
Of the leavings we will help ourselves;
I am sure it is not so bad, sir,
For there is plenty and some to spare."

All being served, we set in a circle,
Around our glowing camp fire;
And many a story and joke were told
Of the olden days and Christmas cheers.

After we had finished our coffee
Sergeant Richards arose with command,
"Three cheers to Adam and Arthur,
And for our fine opossum dinner."

All stories must have an end,
Likewise my song and story;
If any should doubt the truth therein
I will prove it by Adam Mory.

≡ Note by the Author ≡

The subjects and characters of this story are real and any of the survivors of Co. E will remember the circumstance. Also the comrades of Co. H and Co. K.

Of the eight members of our mess 'here are but two survivors. Sergeant Richards sleeps beneath a beautiful mound at the Waupaca home, his wife sleeps by his side. Corporal Clifford is resting in the cemetery at the Minnehaha Soldiers' home near St. Paul. Joseph Hall rests at Broadhead, Wis. Thomas Knite rests at Footville, Wis. Brother Hiram is sleeping at the Milwaukee home. Adam Mory I know not what has become of him. I have been told that he is dead. William Freeman is living in the northwest section of Iowa.

The writer still survives and is in fairly good health, now 70 years old, and fair prospects of several years in the future.

To any who would wish my book "Memorandum and Anecdotes of the Civil War," including this pamphlet, to any address, 25 cents.

Arthur J. Robinson,

Kaukauna, Wis., Box 161



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Know ye, That Arthur J. Robinson
 of Company E, 33rd Wisconsin
 VOLUNTEER'S, he was enrolled on the 10th day of August
 one thousand eight hundred and 63 years of
 age, Discharged from the service of the United States
 this 10th day of August, 1863 at St. Albans
Maine by reason of being discharged
 (No objection to his being re-enrolled is known to exist.)
 That Arthur J. Robinson was born in Belmont
Mass. on the 10th day of August, 1863 years of
age feet eight inches high light complexion blue eyes
light hair and by occupation when enrolled, a farmer
 Given at St. Albans Me. this 10th day of
August 1863

Approved and signed by the commanding officer
 of the regiment, and countersigned by the
 adjutant-general of the army.

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Facsimile of Discharge of Arthur J. Robinson,
 Co. E, 33rd Wis. Vols.

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